



Distance and Intimacy

Seeing each other whole and wide against a wide sky

“The kingdom of God is within you.” *Luke 17:20*



Reading material:

*Peter Feldmeier, *The Developing Christian: Henri Nouwen, Exemplar of the Spiritual Journey*, pp226-8

^www.henrinouwen.org interview.

Picture: Rembrandt's Prodigal Son. Photo: [Simon Hattinga Verschure](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The standing stone:

Nouwen leaves us the image of the prodigal son, one of intimacy. Yet to this he later adds the word 'distance', and 'the open hand', one that does not cling. To not cast a shadow onto each other and even God to allow distance so that both may grow. The standing stone(s) may be an apt image.

Live standing,
live straight,
not pulling away
from your deepest self
where God is^



What is home?

The Dutch priest Henri Nouwen is renowned as an eloquent commentator and witness of the inner life. Having graduated to teaching pastoral and liberation theology at America's prestigious universities he felt as though his inner life was wasting away. Offered a home at a community for adults with learning difficulties (Daybreak, a L'Arche community) he discovered a place of belonging. Having tried to satisfy the voice that said "Make your way in the world, be a success!" he yearned for that place of unconditional love, of family, friendship and intimacy - of home..

'The greatest challenge for him was to let go of his reputation, his ambitions, and his ego and to **enter more deeply into his soul so as to enter more deeply into humanity and the mystery of God himself...** the typical movement of mid-life.*

With the breakdown of a close relationship he moved away in order to learn how best to be at L'Arche. His later days ruminated on the thought, What is home?

"Where people fear loneliness they tend to cling to others instead of creating space for them...Intimacy is like a cupped hand that holds a bird, neither totally open nor totally closed, It is the space where growth can take place". (Reaching Out, Henri Nouwen)

When considered in relation to God such an open space, a 'lightness of touch' can seem like a disconnected distance. It is the aspect of God that is impenetrable, cloudy- 'you cannot see me face to face'. It is such mystery that deepens our awe of God and hollows out our familiar hearts.

Nouwen continues. First loneliness is that desire for intimacy that is found from friends and family, its finding a home. Yet there is a **second loneliness**, some form of dislocation or distance is experienced that when allowed opens up in us the desire to let God be all and all, the very centre of one's life. This then reinforces what home is, and allows re-engagement with our close-knit 'family but also with a wider community.

In short, to give ourselves to an inner journey is to give ourselves to God and to then emerge with a deep connection with humanity. It is a journey of ebb and flow between intimacy and distance that ultimately deepens communion and integration.

Even between the closest human beings, infinite distances continue to exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to see the other whole and wide against a wide sky!

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